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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, April 22, 1932.

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Subject: "Buffet Meals for Easy Entertaining." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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One of the most successful hostesses I know has made a reputation by her buffet meals. She has a small house and does all her own work. But she likes to have her friends in to meals and they enjoy coming. She hasn't room in her tiny dining room to give elaborate luncheons or formal dinners. And she wouldn't have time to prepare and serve them, if she had more room. Yet everyone who has enjoyed her hospitality is eager to have another invitation. Her Sunday night suppers are quite famous. Usually she entertains a dozen or so people at a time. Yes, that many guests, and often more come to eat suppers prepared entirely by her own hands. And they all -- both guests and hostess -- have delicious food and a comfortable, pleasant informal time that is better than a state dinner at Windsor Castle. Even in that small house a good-sized group of people is served easily with no discomfort or strain on anyone's part. How does she do it? By a well-planned, perfectly prepared buffet meal. Cafeteria style entertaining, this is, which allows the guests to serve themselves.

Today I have a buffet supper menu for you. Write it, please, in a safe protected spot in your notebook where it will be ready for some Sunday night, this week, or next, or the week after when you have some people you want to entertain without any fuss and worry over serving. I'll give you the menu first and then a recipe. After that we'll discuss the details -- the hows, whys and wherefores of serving this menu in your home.

The menu: Chicken salad; Potato chips; Pickled peaches, pickled pears, or slices of pineapple; Radishes and Olives; Hot biscuits; and, for dessert, Fresh strawberry icebox cake; and Coffee.

Let me repeat that menu. (REPEAT).

While you have your pencil there at attention, I'll give you the recipe for the best chicken salad that I ever tasted. You can serve it to your guests proudly even if you are entertaining the President of the United States or the Prince of Wales. Eight ingredients:

A 5-pound chicken
Salt
1 onion, sliced
1/2 to 3/4 cup of vinegar

A few drops of tabasco sauce
3 bunches of celery
Thick mayonnaise dressing
Lettuce

Did you get every item on that list? I'll repeat it. (REPEAT) How to fix the chicken is the first question. Place it on a rack in a kettle, half cover it with hot water, and add one teaspoon of salt. Simmer until the chicken is tender. Then remove the kettle from the fire and let the chicken cool in its own broth. When it is cold remove the skin, strip the meat from the bones, and cut it into small pieces of uniform size. Now the chicken is ready for seasoning.

In the meantime, the sliced onion has been soaking in the vinegar. Remove a cup of chicken fat from the cold broth, mix it with the vinegar and pour it over the diced chicken. Add the tabasco sauce. Let this stand, to season, for several hours or overnight. Add more salt and vinegar if needed. Now cut the celery stalks and some of the tender leaves into small pieces and let them stand in a cold place until crisp.

Mix enough well-seasoned mayonnaise dressing with the chicken to coat the pieces well. Shortly before the salad is to be served, add the celery and more mayonnaise if needed. Stir the mixture lightly so as not to break up the chicken. Add still more salt, if it is needed. Pile the salad lightly on crisp green lettuce leaves and serve it at once.

If you like the flavor of capers, add 1/4 cup of these when the celery and chicken are combined. Hard-cooked eggs may be used as a garnish or cut in pieces and mixed with the chicken to make it go further.

There now. Let's go into the details of our supper.

All the food at any buffet meal is served on the dining room table or a main central table which, of course, is the center of interest and can be made most attractive with flowers, candles, silver and your best linen and china. Small tables such as card tables or tea tables may be placed about the house in order that guests may carry their plates to these tables. More often, however, the plate must be held on the lap. My friend provides each of her guests with a little light-weight attractive metal tray to hold his plate. The menu should be planned to add to the color scheme of the table. But plan it also for the convenience of your guests. Avoid food that is hard to handle, or dishes that will tip over easily. Eliminate the use of knives, sherbet glasses, parfait glasses or goblets of water. Food like sliced meat that must be cut up and food that is slippery and can easily slide off the plate can cause plenty of danger and much embarrassment to guests. Food that is creamy or juicy may run in with other food on the plate and make the meal unattractive. Be sure to drain the pickled peaches or pineapple slices well before serving.

Large plates are safest and most convenient for all courses. So are bread or rolls that have been already buttered. This will do away with the need for using butter spreaders, which may be awkward. The salad will be served on the plate with the main course and eaten with the luncheon fork, so be sure there is just enough but not too much dressing used. And be sure the salad is one that can easily be eaten. Of course, you will plan your meal so that the dinner plate will not be crowded with food.

How many courses for a buffet meal? Two should probably be the limit. The main course may consist of one or two hot dishes with a relish, sandwiches, or hot breads, and a salad. Or a hearty meat salad, like the one in our menu, may be used as the main dish. When you are planning the meal, especially a menu with a good deal of variety, think of the appearance of the plate. Will the creamed peas run into the juicy fruit salad and both soak up into the hot biscuit? Better avoid wet foods. The dessert may be a frozen one like icecream, or a gelatin dish, a pudding cake, or short cake. If you want to make the meal a bit fancy, nuts and candy may be served with the dessert.

When the guests come out to the dining room the food, silver, and china for the first course are ready on the table. The chicken salad will be served on a large platter with a large serving fork and spoon so that each guest may serve himself. Potato chips in a bowl, the well drained pickled peaches or sliced pineapple in a shallow bowl or platter and the celery hearts and olives in a relish dish. The hot biscuits, already buttered, will be on a plate folded in a linen napkin. The silver and linen should be the last items on the table to be picked up, for they may be troublesome if on the plate at first.

Silver and china for the second course will be on the side table. When the dessert is served the hostess clears off the first course materials and sets the table for the dessert, placing the silver and dishes needed.

When the table is ready the hostess asks the guests to leave their soiled plates on the side table and serve themselves dessert.

A somewhat less informal type of buffet meal is served with the help of friends or of maids who assist at the table, carry filled plates to the guests, relieve them of soiled dishes and serve the dessert.
